

Charles University in Prague  
Faculty of Education  
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## BACHELOR THESIS

Guard or God? Homonymy in General British and General American  
accents

Guard or God? Homonymie v britské a americké angličtině

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is an original report of my research, has been written by me and has not been submitted for any previous degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Prague, July 11, 2021

Josefina Hahnová

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this thesis is to explore the differences between General British and General American accents, specifically the features that may lead to possible misunderstandings, for instance the word /gɑ:d/ meaning *guard* in the British, however *God* in the American accent. The theoretical part provides a comparative analysis of both standard accents on the segmental and suprasegmental level. The practical part scrutinizes to what extent Czech students of English are aware of accent homonymy and with which accent they associate the selected homonyms.

## **KEY WORDS**

General British, General American, accent homonymy, perception

## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem této práce je zkoumat rozdíly mezi britským (GB) a americkým (GA) výslovnostním standardem k nalezení oblastí, ve kterých může dojít k nedorozumění, například homonymum /gɑ:d/ znamená *guard* v GB, nicméně v GA znamená Bůh. Teoretická část poskytuje komparativní analýzu těch nejvýznamnějších rozdílů mezi těmito dvěma akcenty. Praktická část zkoumá, do jaké míry si jsou čeští studenti anglického jazyka vědomi přízvukové homonymie a s jakým akcentem si spojí vybraná homonyma.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

americký standard, britský standard, přízvuková homonymie, percepce

## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>THEORETICAL PART .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. Accents.....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1. Accents vs dialects .....	9
1.1.1. Regional variation .....	9
1.1.2. Social class variation .....	10
1.1.3. Gender, ethnicity, age, styles .....	11
1.2. English accents worldwide.....	12
1.2.1. General British .....	13
1.2.2. General American .....	14
<b>2. Comparative analysis .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1. Segmental level.....	17
2.1.1. Systemic variation.....	17
2.1.2. Distributional variation .....	18
2.1.3. Lexical variation .....	20
2.1.4. Realization variation .....	21
2.1.5. Other variations.....	23
2.2. Suprasegmental level.....	24
2.2.1. Stress .....	25
2.2.2. Intonation .....	26
2.2.3. Rhythm .....	27
<b>PRACTICAL PART .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>3. Method .....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1. Questionnaire .....	28
3.2. Respondents .....	33
3.3. Data analysis .....	35
<b>4. Results .....</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1. The distribution of /r/ and the absence of /ɹ/ in GA.....	35
4.1.1. Effect of the preferred accent on the results .....	39
4.2. Alveolar tap.....	39
4.2.1. Effect of the preferred accent and contact with native speakers on the perception of [r]	41

4.3.	Homophones ending with /ɔ:/ - rhoticity .....	42
4.4.	Mary, hairy and fairy - /e/ before /r/.....	43
5.	Discussion .....	44
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>		<b>46</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>		<b>48</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>		<b>50</b>

## INTRODUCTION

It was at the third seminar of English phonetics and phonology in the first semester of my studies at the Department of English language and literature at the Faculty of Education in Prague that I became aware that certain sounds are pronounced differently in General British (GB) and General American (GA). The fact that /gɑ:d/ might have two different interpretations according to the accent seemed fascinating to me. As the course proceeded, it aroused my curiosity about exploring many more differences between these two accents. Moreover, I started taking notice of the English accents spoken in films, TV series or YouTube videos and observing how I perceive them. Very soon I realized to which English accent I tend to incline and consequently, the accent of a speaker or an actor has become one of the most important criteria when selecting a film, a TV series or a video to watch.

The theme of various English accents is not confined only to scientific research. Actually, when surfing the Internet or scrolling through videos on social networks a wide variety of humorous videos, where an American corrects the pronunciation of a Briton and vice versa, is available. Thus, this phenomenon is popular and discussed among the general public as well. Nevertheless, it is naturally scientific publications that were used as the main source for this work.

As I delved deeply into all publications providing comparison of General British and General American, I was astonished at the number of differences I managed to find. Yet, some features were mentioned more frequently, while the others rather occasionally. This was the reason that led me to the decision to base the theoretical part on a comparative analysis classifying the differences between GB and GA according to their frequency.

Apart from that, I was also wondering how Czech students of English perceive English accents and with which word they associate homonyms such as /gɑ:d/. In order to discover it, I created a perception test and distributed it at an eight-year grammar school. The test itself comprises 29 ambiguous sentences with missing words, which the students were asked to fill in after listening to short recordings. All the missing words were homonymous, so the student's interpretation might indirectly reflect their accent preference. In addition, this part is preceded by a few questions regarding the student's

experience with English, so various factors such as favourite English/American films/TV series or an acquaintance with a native speaker are taken into consideration when analysing and interpreting the data.



## **THEORETICAL PART**

The aim of the theoretical part of this thesis is to provide insight into the most distinctive differences between General British (GB) and General American (GA) and to classify them according to their significance and frequency of being mentioned in the selected books. Nevertheless, the initial part of this study concerns accents in general: it makes a distinction between an accent and a dialect; then, in order to illustrate the complexity of an accent numerous factors that can be reflected in an accent are dealt with; and equally, it is the English accents worldwide that are explored and characterized. In addition, a considerable part is dedicated to the selected books and to their description. Finally, the last part offers a classification of GB and GA differences.

### **1. Accents**

#### **1.1. Accents vs dialects**

To start with, it is essential to distinguish between a dialect and an accent because sometimes these two terms tend to be confused or misunderstood. In general, it can be said that the existence of accents and dialects stems from the fact that each language has its variations. (Collins, Mees 2003) As far as a dialect is concerned, it covers a wider range of aspects of the particular language, namely the morphological, syntactical, lexical, phonetical and phonological one. (Roach 2009) In other words, two speakers speaking various dialects might opt for different grammatical constructions, for different vocabulary when referring to the same referent and for different pronunciation. However, some phoneticians prefer the term 'variety' to 'dialect'. This term is equally employed to refer to differences in grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary. (Wells 1982). As to accents, it is a "pattern of pronunciation used by a speaker for whom English is the native language or, more generally, by the community or social grouping to which he or she belongs." (Wells : 1). Consequently, it is only pronunciation, or more precisely "particular vowel or consonant sounds and particular rhythmic, intonational, and other prosodic features" (ibid.) that they differ in.

##### **1.1.1. Regional variation**

Accents can tell us a lot about the background of the speaker. As believed by J. C. Wells, the accent might serve as an indicator of the speaker's country (or place) of origin.

In other words, we can usually identify where he or she comes from or where he or she lives. When it comes to the English accents, some of them are more recognizable than the others. In general, the accents spoken in British-oriented countries (i.e., England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand or the West Indies) tend to be identified more easily. On the other hand, it is natural that the person's ability to recognize an accent depends on his or her own geographical identity. For example, an American is more likely to be capable of differentiating between two American accents, while an Englishman might struggle with it. (Wells 1982)

### **1.1.2. Social class variation**

However, not every English accent does display the speaker's geographical origin. In fact, it is the social status that some accents indicate. There is no doubt that language and social status are interconnected. Naturally, it is not only the accent that reflects the speaker's social position, but it is also morphological, syntactical and lexical factors that might reveal it. Still, it seems that pronunciation is the determining factor in England as compared to North America. The most prestigious accent in the UK, particularly in England, is General British<sup>1</sup> (often abbreviated to GB) (Wells 1982) (discussed in 2.2.1).

The triangle in Figure 2. displays how social accents (depicted vertically) and regional accents (depicted horizontally) are related to each other in England. It is evident that the lower the social class of the speaker is the more regional variation the accent of his or her is indicative of. On the contrary, accents spoken by the upper-class and upper middle class (GB) are by no means regional. (ibid.) To summarize it, it can be said that "a maximally broad accent reflects (i) regionally, the highest degree of local distinctiveness, (ii) socially, the lowest social class, and (iii) linguistically, the maximal degree of difference from RP." (ibid.: 14)

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<sup>1</sup> General British (GB) was formerly referred to as Received Pronunciation (RP). (Cruttenden 2014) Since the term 'GB' is much preferred nowadays, the author of this thesis employs it throughout the whole thesis.

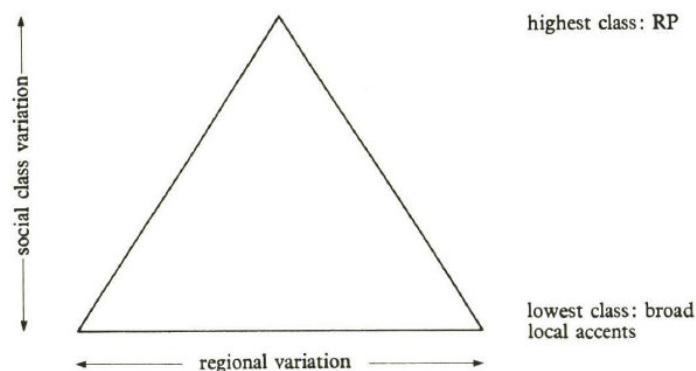


Figure 1. Relation between social and regional accents in England (Wells 1982).

Nevertheless, this model is applicable only to the accents in England and Wales. Actually, in Scotland and Ireland the upper middle class and upper class has its own accent and does not speak GB, which is in fact regarded as a foreign accent there. As to the situation in North America, there is an absence of a non-localizable accent at the top of the pyramid. Thus, an accent of an upper-class speaker living in Virginia would differ considerably from an accent of an upper-class speaker living in Chicago. In other words, American accents of all social classes are characteristic of regional variation. (Wells 1982)

### 1.1.3. Gender, ethnicity, age, styles

Apart from the place of origin and social status, there are also other factors which affect the speech of each individual. Firstly, it is gender and ethnic identity that should be taken into consideration. In comparison with social status, it is not feasible to alter either of these factors throughout the life. As to sex differences, they are determined mainly biologically. From an acoustic point view, women's and men's mean pitch, voice quality and prosodic features such as intonation and tempo differ women use a wider pitch range and more rising tones in their speech than men. Similarly, women's chain of speech is characteristic of being divided into shorter tone units than men's. In addition, sociolinguistic studies have unearthed other sex differences, e.g., in general, women's pronunciation tends to be closer to the prestige norm than men's. (Wells 1982)

As to ethnicity, it is essential to underscore the fact that there is not such a strong correlation between language and ethnic group to be observed. On the one hand it is natural that the language of white people differs from that of black people. Still, what affects the speaker's language more significantly is rather the linguistic environment by which he or she is surrounded throughout the life. As a matter of fact, ethnic characteristics of an accent are often mistaken for geographical ones. (ibid.)

Another factor that is reflected in speech is the age of the speaker. Naturally, during adolescence, when a child, especially a boy, is becoming an adult, his vocal tract undergoes a dramatic change and as a result his voice gets deeper. Equally, when an adult grows older, the voice alters. Apart from these biological changes, there are various other features that characterize the speech of the young and the old. On the whole, old people's speech is rather old-fashioned while young people's speech is characteristic of a plethora of innovations. Furthermore, the accent acquired until the age of adolescence is not likely to alter once one reaches maturity. Consequently, it is children and adolescents who introduce new patterns into pronunciation. (ibid.)

The last determining factor to be mentioned is the role of social context. Each individual tends to adjust his or her pronunciation pattern to concrete situations. The speaker is likely to opt for casual speech, which is rather informal, when being relaxed and having a conversation with family members or friends. On the other hand, such type of speech would be wholly inappropriate to use on social occasions or when talking to a stranger. In such cases it is suitable to opt for formal speech. However, what requires the most formal and monitored style of all is reading aloud, particularly when reading a list of words. (ibid.)

## **1.2. English accents worldwide**

While the previous part has explored various aspects that an accent can reflect, this section provides insight into the most significant English accents worldwide. To begin with, English is spoken as the first language in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland), the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the countries of the Caribbean. (Collins, Mees 2003) Consequently, there is a wide range of English variations (dialects and accents). As to the accents, they can be classified according to the distribution of the consonant /r/, which is in phonology termed rhoticity.

The accents where the consonant /r/ is pronounced only prevocally are referred to as non-rhotic (or 'r-less'), while those where /r/ occurs in all environments, that is to say preconsonantly and prepausally as well as prevocally, as rhotic (or 'r-ful'). (Wells 1982)

In order to be able to comprehend why certain English accents are rhotic, while the others are non-rhotic, it is crucial to provide an outline of the development of the English language, particularly in terms of rhoticity. English in Britain has not been non-rhotic since the very beginning. In fact, it was characteristic of its rhoticity until the Early Modern English period. As a consequence, the English language brought to North America by the English colonists in the 17th century was rhotic. (Gut 2009) It was in the course of the 18th century<sup>2</sup> that historical /r/ vanished from preconsonantal or word-final environments of Standard English on the British Isles. This 'r-dropping' gave birth to non-rhotic accents. (Wells 1982) Apart from the majority of British accents, it is also Australian English, Singapore English and Nigerian English that are rhotic accents, since they were founded by the British whose English was already non-rhotic at that time. (Gut 2009)

To conclude, rhoticity is characteristic of most North American accents, namely General American and Canadian English. On the contrary, the accents spoken in some coastal areas in the south-eastern United States, in New England and African American Vernacular English are non-rhotic. As to Scottish and Irish accents, they are both rhotic as well as the speech of the West Country and some parts of Lancashire in England. On the other hand, General British and the majority of other English and also Welsh accents are non-rhotic, as is Australian, New Zealand and South African English. (Barber 2009)

### **1.2.1. General British**

As it has been already suggested in 2.1.2, the accent which is regarded as the most prestigious in England is known as General British (GB). This term was employed for the first time by W. Lewis in 1972 and superseded the term 'Received Pronunciation' (RP) (Cruttenden 2001) Sometimes it is also called 'BBC English' or even 'Standard English'. Although it is geographically associated with England, it is not confined to any particular

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<sup>2</sup> U. Gut claims that it was in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. (Gut 2009)

area. In fact, this accent displays rather the speaker's status; it is characteristic of the upper and upper middle class. (Wells 1982)

### 1.2.2. General American

On the other hand, in the USA there is no accent which could be compared to GB. In fact, we can distinguish three accents in the USA: Eastern, Southern, and General American (see Figure 1.). Both Southern and Eastern accents are non-rhotic, while General American is rhotic. As to geography, eastern accents are spoken in Boston, eastern New England and New York City, while southern accents in the south of the USA. (Wells 1982) General American is the accent spoken by two-thirds of Americans. Equally, this is the accent that learners of English as a foreign language learn- 'the type of American English which may be heard, with slight variations, from Ohio through the Middle West and to the Pacific Coast' (Prator & Robinett 1972). Even though it is not a consistent accent, it is suitable for comparison. (Wells 1982)

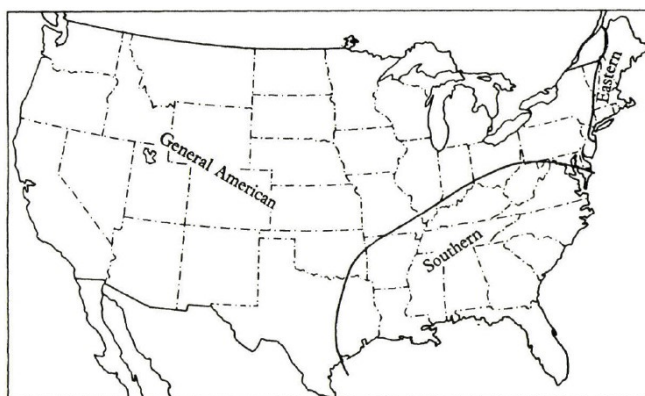


Figure 1. Division of accents in the USA (Bronstein : 44).

## 2. Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis is based on eleven selected books. Before the analysis itself, it is vital to mention and briefly summarize these publications. In general, it can be said that all of them deal with English phonetics and phonology. Nevertheless, they can be further subdivided according to their major topic.

The first two books to be mentioned study mainly the English accents. The first piece of work is the three volumes of *Accents of English* written by the British phonetician

and Esperantist J. C. Wells and published in 1982. It is the only book (of the selected ones) that provides such a detailed insight into the English accents.

The second publication is *English Accents and Dialects*, a joint work of A. Hughes and P. Trudgill, first published in 1979. Unfortunately, this book mentions General American only occasionally as the English accents spoken beyond the British Isles are not discussed there, thus not so many facts have been relevant and could be used in the comparative analysis.

Another category of the selected books is represented by numerous books that serve as a general introduction to English phonetics and phonology. Although these publications tend to have similar structure and contents, they are not all identical, for some of them investigate GB while the others GA. Consequently, two sub-categories of these sources can be created: books providing introduction to phonetics and phonology of either GB or GA.

As to the books dealing predominantly with GB, the fourth edition of *The Pronunciation of English* written by the British phonetician D. Jones (1881-1967) and published in 1967 is of fundamental importance. Despite the fact that the author bases his theory on General British, he frequently displays and draws attention to variations among the English accents, so many pieces of information mentioned in this book have been relevant to the analysis.

Another 'GB-oriented' book is *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* written by the English phonetician A. Ch. Gimson (1917-1985). It is the sixth and the eighth editions, revised by A. Cruttenden, titled *Gimson's Pronunciation of English* and published in 2001 and 2014 respectively, that have proved to be useful. As to the former edition, published in 2001, several chapters concerning the English accents and their comparison were added. In the latter edition, published in 2014, A. Cruttenden puts forward the idea that the term "General British" is much more suitable than "Received Pronunciation" since RP tends to be associated mainly with the upper-class speech and is often presented as old-fashioned. (Cruttenden 2014)

Another prominent British phonetician is P. Roach. Two books of his have contributed to the analysis: *Phonetics*, published in 2001, and *English Phonetics and Phonology, A practical course*. It was particularly the 4th edition of the latter, published

in 2009, that has been used for the analysis, for a chapter which discusses variations of the English language is included.

Another book which draws a comparison between General British and General American is *Practical Phonetics and Phonology* written by B. Collins and I. M. Mees. The most significant part for the analysis is the section 'exploration', since it scrutinizes variations of English spoken worldwide.

Lastly, it is *Introduction to English Phonetics and Phonology* written by the German phonetician U. Gut and published in 2009 that has proved to be invaluable as a source of information because the author describes both GB and GA variants of segments when exploring the phoneme inventory of the English language as well as the allophonic variation of consonants in GB and GA or the word stress.

The second sub-category of the selected books serving as a general introduction to English phonetics and phonology is represented by three publications which are primarily focused on General American: *The Pronunciation of American English* written by the American phonetician A. J. Bronstein, published in 1960; *American Pronunciation* by the American linguist J. S. Kenyon, published in 1969; and *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of North American English* written by the Danish phonetician J. Staun, published in 2010.

The analysis itself proceeds from the most frequent and distinctive differences between GB and GA to the rarer ones. Since numerous kinds of differences are unearthed when comparing two types of pronunciation, the system invented by J. C. Wells has been adapted in this part. Thus, features concerning the segmental level have been classified into four different groups: systemic, distributional, lexical and realization differences. Nevertheless, some differences are not easily classifiable, so they are enumerated in the section "others". Features regarding suprasegmental phonology such as word stress, rhythm or intonation are dealt with towards the end of the analysis.

The majority of differences are illustrated in the charts below. All the sources where the particular difference occurred are deliberately mentioned in brackets with the intention of emphasizing the importance of the particular feature.



## 2.1. Segmental level

### 2.1.1. Systemic variation

Systemic variation relates to the differences in the inventory of phonemes. It means that the systems are not identical and differ in some aspects; they might contain either a larger or a smaller amount of phonemes. (Wells 1982)

Firstly, the most prominent feature mentioned in each of the selected books is the absence of the monophthong /ɒ/ in GA. In fact, GA substitutes this sound for /ɑ:/. (Gimson 1980; Wells 1982; Cruttenden 2001; Bronstein 1960; Staun 2010; Gut 2009; Kenyon 1969; Jones 1966; Collins, Mees 2003; Roach 2009) This phenomenon is illustrated in Table 1. Moreover, as believed by D. Jones, some GA speakers prefer producing the diphthong /ʌ/ in some words such as *what* or *of*, where GB speakers pronounce /ɒ/. Thus, they pronounce it /whʌt/ and /ʌf/. (Jones 1966)

	GB	GA
God	/gɒd/	/gɑ:d/
mock	/mɒk/	/mɑ:k/
bomb	/bɒm/	/bɑ:m/

Table 1. The words illustrating the absence of /ɒ/ in GA.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the majority of books underscore that GA lacks centring diphthongs /ɪə, eə, ʊə/ and triphthongs /eɪə, aɪə, ɔɪə, aʊə, əʊə/. Both these characteristics stem from the fact that unlike GB, GA belongs to the category of rhotic accents (discussed in *distributional variation*), which means that every <r> is pronounced. Consequently, either sequences of vowels plus /r/ or r-coloured vowels (/ə/) are pronounced in GA instead. (Gimson 1980; Bronstein 1960; Wells 1982; Gut 2009; Kenyon 1969; Staun 2010; Cruttenden 2001)

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<sup>3</sup> If not mentioned in the caption, the words were chosen by the author of this thesis.

	GB	GA
here	/hɪə/	/hɪr/
pure	/pjʊə/	/pjʊr/
fair	/feə/	/fer/
fire	/faɪə/	/faɪr/ or /faɪər/
power	/paʊə/	/paʊə/ or /paʊr/

Table 2. The words illustrating the absence of centring diphthongs in GA.

Some books mention that occasionally, GA speakers use an extra phoneme /ʌ/ or the cluster /hw/ in words containing <wh> such as *white* or *whale*. Thus, the transcription /hwaɪt/ or /ʌwaɪt/ and /hweɪl/ or /ʌweɪl/. (Wells 1982; Kenyon 1969; Jones 1966; Collins, Mees 2003)

### 2.1.2. Distributional variation

Distributional differences explore the limits of particular phonemes, the environment in which they occur, in each accent, even though the inventory of phonemes might be the same. (Cruttenden 2001)

The most noticeable difference between GB and GA is the distribution of /r/. Since GB is a member of non-rhotic accents, /r/ is pronounced only when <r> occurs in the prevocalic position. Whereas in GA /r/ is distributed invariably as it belongs to rhotic accents. Actually, /r/ is pronounced preconsonantly and prepausally as well as prevocalically (illustrated in Table 3.). (Gimson 1980; Wells 1982; Cruttenden 2001; Bronstein 1960; Staun 2010; Gut 2009; Kenyon 1969; Jones 1966; Roach 2009; Hughes, Trudgill 1979; Roach 2001; Collins, Mees 2003) Consequently, this reality affects GA monophthongs, diphthongs and triphthongs which are very often given an r-like effect. (Jones 1966) (discussed in 3.1.1.)

	GB	GA
smart	/smɑ:t/	/smɑ:rt/
car	/kɑ:/	/kɑ:r/
player	/pleɪə/	/pleɪə/ or /pleɪər/

Table 3. Examples of different distribution of /r/ in GB and GA.

Another significant feature of GB is noticeable when dental and alveolar obstruents and sonorants /θ, t, d, s, z, n, l/ are followed by /u/ in stressed position. In this case the sound /j/ is inserted between the consonant and the vowel. Moreover, /tj/ and /dj/ are regularly changed into /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. However, GA speakers do not produce the /j/ sound in these cases. This characteristic feature of GA is termed yod-dropping. (Gimson 1980; Bronstein 1960; Wells 1982; Kenyon 1969; Hughes, Trudgill 1979; Roach 2000; Collins, Mees 2003; Staun 2010)

	GB	GA
tune	/tju:n/ or /tʃu:n/	/tu:n/
new	/nju:/	/nu:/
due	/dju:/ or /dʒu:/	/du:/
presume	/prɪ'zju:m/	/prɪ'zu:m/

Table 4. The words illustrating yod-dropping in GA.

There are also some minor distributional variations mentioned in the works by Collins & Mees and Staun. One of them is that unlike GB, GA does not differentiate between /e/, /æ/, /eə/, when it precedes /r/. In fact, all of them are pronounced as /e/. Secondly, the authors claim that in the words where GB speakers produce /ʌ/ before /r/, GA speakers pronounce /ɜ/. (Collins, Mees 2003; Staun 2010) Lastly, Collins & Mees argue that in words such as *happy*, *pretty*, *committee*, the vowel /ɪ/ tends to be pronounced as /i:/ in GA. (Collins, Mees 2003)

	GB	GA
merry	/meri/	/meri/
Mary	/meəri/	/meri/
marry	/mæri/	/meri/
hurry	/hʌri/	/hɜ:ri/
happy	/hæpi/	/hæpi:/

Table 5. Examples illustrating minor distributional variations.

### 2.1.3. Lexical variation

Lexical differences are also called differences of lexical incidence. They examine the occurrence of different phonemes in particular words, even though the system does not have to differ. However, unlike the distributional differences, this variation is not caused by syllable-position. (Cruttenden 2001)

The most salient variation concerns words which in GB have /ɑ:/ whereas in GA they have /æ/. The words *past*, *dance* or *glance* can be used to illustrate this point. GB speakers pronounce them /pɑ:st/, /dɑ:ns/ and /glɑ:ns/ while in GA they are pronounced /pæst/, /pæst/ and /glæns/. (Gimson 1980; Wells 1982; Gut 2009; Jones 1966; Collins, Mees 2003) On the contrary, many foreign names and words such *pasta*, *Picasso*, *macho*, *mafia* are pronounced with /ɑ:/ in GA, but with /æ/ in GB. (Collins, Mees 2003) Secondly, many words where <ile> occurs in the final position have /əl/ or /l/ in GA whereas /aɪl/ in GB. Therefore, *fertile* is pronounced /fɜ:taɪl/ in GB, but /fɜ:təl/ or /fɜ:tl/ in GA. (Collins, Mees 2003)

Apart from this there is a wide range of individual words which are pronounced differently. Their pronunciation does not follow any particular rules, so they have to be memorised. Firstly, certain phonemes might be substituted by other ones: monophthongs might be either replaced by other monophthongs such as in *leisure* or by diphthongs and vice versa such as in *(n)either*, *tomato*, *vitamin* or *vase*. (Roach 2009)

Consonants are affected as well, which is noticeable in *schedule*, where one phoneme is substituted by two completely different phonemes. The word *herb* exemplifies that some consonants might be completely omitted. On the contrary, the

words *figure* or *suggest* illustrate that other consonants might be inserted. Lastly, the word *lieutenant* demonstrates that words borrowed from foreign languages very often do not bear much resemblance in GB and GA in terms of pronunciation.

	GB	GA
either/neither	/aɪðə/ /naɪðə/	/iːðə/ /niːðə/
tomato	/təˈmɑːtəʊ/	/təˈmeɪtəʊ/
vitamin	/vɪtəˈmɪn/	/vaɪtəˈmɪn/
vase	/vɑːz/	/veɪs, veɪz/
herb	/hɜːb/	/ɜːb/
figure	/fɪɡə/	/fɪɡjə/
suggest	/səˈdʒest/	/səgˈdʒest/
leisure	/leɪzə/	/liːzə/
schedule	/ʃedʒuːl/	/skedʒuːl/
lieutenant	/leɪˈtenənt/	/luːˈtenənt/

Table 6. Words showing differences of lexical incidence.

Other lexical variations deal with stress shift. Since it is part of the features studied by suprasegmental phonology, they will be discussed later in the section *suprasegmental differences*.

#### 2.1.4. Realization variation

The last type of differences observes the phonetic realization of phonemes in a word, although the inventory of phonemes might be identical. (Cruttenden 2001)

The first salient difference to be mentioned is t-voicing, usually called the alveolar (voiced) tap. It is indicative not only of GA, but also of other varieties of American English. It occurs in an intervocalic position when /t/ is preceded by a stressed vowel either within the word such as in *water* or even across word boundaries, e.g., *hit in*. Equally, this variation applies to the words such as *party*, in which /t/ follows /r/ and to the words such as *bottle* or *letter*, where /t/ is followed by the syllabic /r/ or /l/. Sometimes,

the listener might struggle to differentiate between /d/ and a voiced /t/. Consequently, the pronunciation of *latter* and *ladder* does not differ. (Gimson 1980; Wells 1982; Gut 2009; Jones 1966; Collins, Mees 2003; Staun 2010; Bronstein 1960; Kenyon 1969; Roach 2009)

Lastly, it is essential to underscore that since this variation is frequent in GA, it is to be found in phonetic transcriptions as /t/, even though it is not a phoneme, but an allophone of /t/. (ibid.) Various examples are listed in Table 7 below.

	GB	GA
water	/wɔ:tə/	/wɑ:tə/
party	/pa:ti/	/pa:rti/
bottle	/bɒtl/	/bɑ:tl/
latter	/lætə/	/lættə/

Table 7. Examples of different realization of /t/ in GB and GA.

Another prominent feature is the realization of /l/. GB speakers produce a clear [l] before vowels and a dark [ɫ] in all other positions. On the contrary, in GA /l/ is more velarized and tends to be realised as dark [ɫ] in every position of the word. (Gimson 1980; Wells 1982; Gut 2009; Jones 1966; Collins, Mees 2003; Staun 2010; Bronstein 1960; Kenyon 1969; Roach 2009). In addition, Collins & Mees argue that some GB speakers might struggle to differentiate between *life* and *wife* because the pronunciation of dark [ɫ] in an initial position is akin to /w/. (Collins, Mees 2003)

	GB	GA
like	[laɪk]	[ɫaɪk]
blue	[blu:]	[bɫu:]
Paul	[pɔ:ɫ]	[pɔ:ɫ]

Table 8. Words showing different realization of /l/ in GB and GA.

The realization of vowels can be affected as well. In fact, they are more susceptible to changes in any accent. The first noticeable difference is the realization of

the GB closing diphthong /əʊ/. Phonetically, this sound “starts higher and more central than the corresponding diphthong in GA.” (Gut : 62) While in GA this diphthong is “more back and rounded” (Collins & Mees : 159) and is transcribed as /oʊ/.

However, the American phonetician A. J. Bronstein puts forward the idea that the diphthong /oʊ/ might be also regarded as a nonphonemic variant of /o/. (Bronstein 1960) Moreover, Gimson, Gut and Staun highlight that some Americans have an inclination to pronounce the words containing /oʊ/ or /eɪ/ with the monophthongs [e], [e:] or [o], [o:]. (Gimson 1980; Gut 2009; Staun 2010) Nevertheless, the majority of GA speakers tend to produce them with the diphthong.

	GB	GA
old	/əʊld/	/oʊld/
yellow	/jeləʊ/	/jeloo/
bode	/bəʊd/	/boʊd/, occasionally [bɒd]

Table 9. Examples of different realization of vowels in GB and GA.

Apart from this, there are some other minor variations mentioned by the authors of the selected books. According to Collins and Mees, in GA the pronunciation of the vowel /æ/ tends to be closer and prolonged. Hence, it resembles the sound [ɛ:], whose quality is comparable with the GB diphthong /eə/. The authors also maintain that in general, the monophthong /ʌ/ is closer in GA than in GB. As a matter of fact, it sounds more like /ə/. (Collins, Mees 2003)

### 2.1.5. Other variations

The following section is the last part exploring the segmental level. It provides insight into other tendencies which occur in GB and GA. Since none of them has been mentioned repeatedly, it can be assumed that they are not as crucial as the previous ones. Nevertheless, it might be worthwhile to enumerate them. All of them display rather preferences of particular speakers.

Firstly, as claimed by D. Jones, in GA there is a tendency to insert the consonant /t/ between /n/ and /s/ in such words as *tense* /tents/ or *once* /wʌnts/. (Jones 1966) On the

other hand, as specified by U. Gut, some GA speakers do not pronounce the consonant /t/ in unstressed syllables when they are preceded by /n/. To exemplify this point, the words such as *winter* [wɪnəɪ] or *rental* [renəl] may be used. (Gut 2009)

J. S. Kenyon and J. C. Wells describe a slight difference between the pronunciation of the words ending with <tion>. According to them, in GB they seem to be pronounced in most cases with the syllabic /ŋ/ while in GA with /ən/. (Kenyon 1969; Wells 1982) The former also asserts that the pronunciation of the first syllables in *employ*, *expect*, *engage* might vary. (Kenyon 1969) Both of these dissimilarities are displayed in the following chart.

	GB	GA
nation	/neɪʃŋ/	/neɪʃən/
condition	/kəndɪʃŋ/	/kəndɪʃən/
vision	/vɪʒŋ/	/vɪʒən/
employ	/ɪm'plɔɪ/	/em'plɔɪ/
expect	/ɪk'spekt/	/ek'spekt/
engage	/ɪn'geɪdʒ/	/en'geɪdʒ/

Table 10. The words ending with -tion or starting with <e> pronounced differently in GB and GA. (Kenyon 1969; Wells 1982)

A. J. Bronstein notes that the pronunciation of [n] x [ŋ] might differ in many words where <n> is followed by <c>, <q> or <g>. For instance, *concord*, *concubine*, *concourse*, *income*, *concrete*, and *pancake* might be pronounced with both /n/ or /ŋ/ in both accents. Whereas *concave*, *encourage*, *engrave*, *incapable*, *incognito*, *enclose* and *incline* are likely to be pronounced with /n/ in GA and with either /ŋ/ or /n/ in GB. On the contrary, *Congreve*, *syncope*, *conquest*, *congruence*, and *idiosyncrasy* are usually pronounced with /ŋ/ in GB and with both /ŋ/ and /n/ in GA. (Bronstein 1960)

## 2.2. Suprasegmental level

The following section delves into the distinctions concerning suprasegmental phonology, namely word stress, rhythm, and intonation.



### 2.2.1. Stress

As to stress dissimilarities, a wide range of GB and GA words differ. Firstly, it is certain words borrowed from French whose pronunciation is dissimilar. GB speakers stress the first syllable whereas GA speakers the final one. To exemplify this point, *ballet*, *Bernard*, *brochure*, *buffet*, *baton*, *garage*, or *perfume* might be used. (Kenyon 1969; Wells 1982; Gut 2009; Jones 1966; Collins, Mees 2003)

Secondly, the disyllabic suffixes <ary>, <ery> or <ory> in words of four or more syllables epitomise a strong penultimate vowel in GA and might consequently carry the secondary stress in this accent. Conversely, in GB the pronunciation of these suffixes is generally weakened. (ibid.)

	GB	GA
ballet	/ˈbæleɪ/	/bæˈleɪ/
Bernard	/ˈbɜːnəd/	/bæˈnɑːrd/
brochure	/ˈbrəʊʃə/	/brɒʊˈʃɔːr/
buffet	/ˈbʊfeɪ/	/bəˈfeɪ/
baton	/ˈbætn/	/bəˈtɑːn/
garage	/ˈgærɑːʒ/ or /ˈgærɪdʒ/	/gəˈrɑːʒ/
perfume	/ˈpɜː.fjuːm/	/pɜːˈfjuːm/
secretary	/ˈsekrət(ə)rɪ/	/ˈsekrəˌteri/
necessary	/ˈnesəs(ə)rɪ/	/ˈnesəˌserɪ/
military	/ˈmɪlət(ə)rɪ/	/ˈmɪləˌteri/
mandatory	/ˈmændət(ə)rɪ/	/ˈmændəˌtɔːrɪ/
cemetery	/ˈsemət(ə)rɪ/	/ˈseməˌteri/

Table 11. Words demonstrating different stress placement in French loanwords and in words containing the disyllabic suffixes <ary>, <ery> or <ory> in GB and GA.

In some other words such as *capillary*, *corollary* or *laboratory* the stress is shifted from the first syllable to the second one in GB. On the contrary, the suffixes <ile> and

<ization> are pronounced as /aɪ/ in GB, yet in GA their strength is reduced. (Kenyon 1969; Wells 1982; Gut 2009; Jones 1966; Collins, Mees 2003) Naturally, there are various other individual words whose stress placement differs. Their examples are listed toward the end of the chart below.

	GB	GA
capillary	/kə'pɪləɪ/	/'kæpələri/
corollary	/'kɔ:rələri/	/kə'rɒləɪ/
laboratory	/lə'bɒrət(ə)ɪ/	/'læbrətɔ:ɪ/
hostile	/'hɒstail/	/'hɑ:stəl/
organization	/,ɔ:gənəɪ'zeɪʃn/	/,ɔrgənə'zeɪʃən/
primarily	/'praɪm(ə)rɪli/	/,praɪ'merɪli/
cigarette	/,sɪgə'ret/	/'sɪgə,ret/
harass (ment)	/'hærəsmənt/	/hə'ræsmənt/
resource	/rɪ'zɔ:s/ or /rɪ:'sɔ:s/	/'ri:sɔ:rs/
research	/rɪ'sɜ:tʃ/	/rɪ'sɜ:tʃ/
ordinarily	/'ɔ:dənərəli/	/,ɔ:rdən'erəli/

Table 12. Individual words demonstrating stress differences in GB and GA.

### 2.2.2. Intonation

Unfortunately, few books provide a comparison of the intonation of GB and GA. D. Jones's book is one of them and he maintains that GB speakers typically end a sentence with a fall-rise while a high-pitched fall-rise is employed in GA. Secondly, GA speakers tend to employ the simple rise in sentences where GB speakers use fall-rise. The pictures below using the clause *Can't you find it?* illustrate this point. (Jones 163)

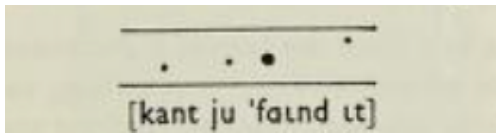


Figure 2. Picture illustrating the GA simple rise (Adapted from Jones 1963)

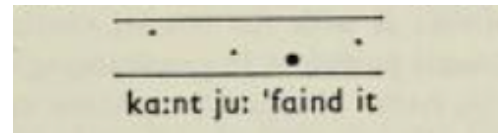


Figure 3. Picture illustrating the GB fall-rise (Adapted from Jones 1963).

Then, the authors Collins and Mees have noticed that GB intonation is characteristic of many rapid pitch changes while "rises and falls are more spread out over the whole" in GA. (Collins, Mees: 1963) Consequently, it might cause the fact the GB speakers perceive GA as tedious while GB might be regarded as pretended by Americans. (Collins, Mees 2003)

### 2.2.3. Rhythm

As far as rhythm is concerned, there is a significant difference in the rate of delivery. The slow rate of delivery is indicative of GA as there is a tendency to prolong vowels such as /æ/. On the contrary, GB is known to omit weakly stressed vowels, so the rate of delivery is much quicker. (Collins, Mees 2003)

## **PRACTICAL PART**

The aim of the practical part is to answer two research questions that were formulated:

1. To which extent are Czech students of the English language aware of accent homonymy?
2. With which accent do Czech students of the English language associate the selected homonyms?

In order to answer these research questions a questionnaire employing perception was devised.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Questionnaire**

The test was created in Google Forms. The link to the online form is available here: <https://forms.gle/9EonFcvP2Qofam6u9>. There is a short introduction at the beginning and then the students were asked a few questions concerning their sex, age, year, length of learning English and about their experience with this language. They were also asked what their preferred English accent and their favourite British or American TV series is and whether they have friends whose mother tongue is English.

The perception test itself comprises 29 questions. Each question contains instructions, a link to a short recording and a sentence with a missing word. The students were asked to click on the link, listen to the recording at least twice and fill in the missing word in the sentence. After completing the test, they only send the answers.

The recordings have been created via <https://ttsmp3.com/>. This website enables to convert text to speech and download the recording. In addition, one can choose an accent of the voice that pronounces the text. In this case, GB and GA voices were selected.

The questions and the recordings are rather short. They were deliberately formed in such a way that two different interpretations were possible depending on the accent (GB or GA). Generally, the selected homophones may be divided into four categories.

The first category is the most essential one. It concerns the realization of the consonant /r/ (distributional variation) and differences in the inventory of phonemes (systemic variation), namely the absence of the monophthong /ɒ/ in GA. It scrutinizes

how the students perceive sentences which contain homophones such as *mock* x *mark*, *dock* x *dark* or *bomb* x *balm*. If the student hears a word containing the /ɑ:/ sound and writes down the word with <o> (e.g., *mock*), it is a clear indication of his or her exposure to GA. On the contrary, if the word with <r> is written down (e.g., *mark*), it indicates that the student has an inclination towards GB.

Each selected homophone is used in two different sentences. One of the sentences is always pronounced by an American and the second one by a Briton. Consequently, we should be able to explore how the speaker's accent (GB or GA) influences the student's interpretation.

The sentences are enumerated in the table below. It also displays the accent of the speaker. The words in bold are those which can lead to misinterpretation. Their transcription is in the third column. The number in the fourth column indicates the order of the sentence in the test.

sentence	accent	pronunciation	order
The <b>God</b> was sitting <sup>4</sup> by the lake.	GA	/gɑ:d/	1.
The <b>guard</b> protects us.	GB	/gɑ:d/	14.
What <sup>5</sup> a big <b>shock</b> !	GA	/ʃɑ:k/	9.
Was it a <b>shark</b> ?	GB	/ʃɑ:k/	21.
Can you see the <b>cod</b> ?	GA	/kɑ:d/	4.
Have you taken my <b>card</b> ?	GB	/kɑ:d/	12.
Is it his <b>pot</b> ?	GA	/pɑ:t/	26.
Is it my <b>part</b> ?	GB	/pɑ:t/	16.
Do not <b>mock</b> his mistakes!	GA	/mɑ:k/	28.
She <b>marked</b> the student's comments.	GB	/mɑ:kt/	8.
Where <sup>6</sup> have you put the <b>bomb</b> ?	GA	/bɑ:m/	29.

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<sup>4</sup> The word *sitting* is pronounced with alveolar tap in GA. Since it does not exist in GB, the student might recognize that it is pronounced by an American and therefore opt for the word *God*.

<sup>5</sup> /t/ in *what* is pronounced with the alveolar tap, which is indicative of GA. Thus, the student might be influenced by it and opt for the American *shock*.

<sup>6</sup> As GA is a rhotic accent, /r/ is pronounced in the word *where*. Consequently, the student might recognize that it is pronounced by an American and opt for the American *bomb*.

<i>Why do we use <b>balms</b>?<sup>7</sup></i>	GB	/bɑ:mz/	5.
<i>The vehicle came in the <b>dock</b>.</i>	GA	/dɑ:k/	23.
<i>The truck vanished in the <b>dark</b>.</i>	GB	/dɑ:k/	10.

Table 13. Sentences dealing with distributional and systemic variations.

In the 4th and the 5th sentence we might anticipate a problem, for the students do not have to be familiar with the words *cod* and *balms*. Thus, it is highly likely that they will opt for *card* and *bombs*. The other words should be well-known.

The second category examines whether Czech students are acquainted with the alveolar tap. As this realization variation is indicative of GA, we might presume that the students' knowledge of it is connected with their inclination to this accent. All sentences in this section have been pronounced by American speakers as GB lacks this variation. Nevertheless, as the alveolar tap resembles /d/ sound, we have to expect that the student might opt for the word where /d/ occurs. In that case, we might only assume that the student inclines to GB, for the /d/ sound is pronounced identically in GB and GA.

The sentences are listed in the table below. The words in which the alveolar tap occurs are in bold and their pronunciation is written in the second column. The third and the fourth column display possible interpretation of the particular pronunciation. The last column shows the order of the sentence in the test.

sentence	pronunciation (GA)	GA - possible interpretations	GB - possible interpretations	order
<i>I don't know who <b>hit</b> it.</i>	/hɪtɪt/	<i>hit it, hid it</i>	<i>hid it</i>	3.
<i>Can you show me that <b>metal</b>?</i>	/metɪ/	<i>metal, medal</i>	<i>medal</i>	7.
<i>That seems <b>fated</b>.</i>	/feɪtɪd/	<i>fated, faded</i>	<i>faded</i>	11.
<i>Do you know how to <b>write</b> it?</i>	/raɪtɪt/	<i>write it, ride it</i>	<i>ride it</i>	13.

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<sup>7</sup> The homophone /bɑ:m/ differs from the other homophones, for it is pronounced identically in GB and GA, so rhoticity cannot be observed in this case. Nonetheless, if the student writes down *bomb*, it indicates his or her inclination to GA.

<i>I could choose between these two things and I have decided that the <b>latter</b> is more<sup>8</sup> useful.</i>	/lætə/	<i>latter, ladder</i>	<i>ladder</i> <sup>9</sup>	15.
<i>Have you already <b>seated</b> them?</i>	/si:tɪd/	<i>seated, seeded</i>	<i>seeded</i>	17.
<i>Can we place a <b>bet on</b> it?</i>	/betɑ:n/	<i>bet on, bed on</i>	<i>bed on</i> <sup>10</sup>	20.
<i>The child has been given a <b>pat on</b> the head.</i>	/pætɑ:n/	<i>pat on, pad on</i>	<i>pad on</i> <sup>11</sup>	22.
<i>The <b>matter</b> is being looked at.</i>	/mætə/	<i>matter, madder</i>	<i>madder</i> <sup>12</sup>	24.

Table 14. Sentences dealing with the alveolar tap.

The third type of the sentences is based on the fact that GA is a rhotic accent and GB a non-rhotic one. Several words ending with /ɔ:/ have been selected in order to reveal whether the students tend to associate this sound merely with the words which are pronounced identically in both GB and GA, or whether the word which is pronounced with /ɔ:/ only in GB crosses their mind. In case they write down the former, it does not display any preference. However, if they opt for the latter, it might be an indication of their preference for GB.

The sentences are cited in the following table. All of them were pronounced by a British speaker. The words in which this ambiguity might occur are in bold and their pronunciation is written in the second column. The third and the fourth column display possible interpretations of the particular pronunciation. The last column shows the order of the sentence in the test.

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<sup>8</sup> The word *more* is pronounced /mɔ:r/ in GA while /mɔ:/ in GB in this sentence. This might influence the student's choice.

<sup>9</sup> The word *ladder* would be transcribed as /lædər/ in GB. The r-coloured schwa /ə/ is used in GA.

<sup>10</sup> The preposition *on* would be transcribed as /ɒn/ in GB.

<sup>11</sup> The preposition *on* would be transcribed as /ɒn/ in GB.

<sup>12</sup> The word *madder* would be transcribed as /mædər/ in GB. The r-coloured schwa /ə/ is used GA.

sentence	pronunciation (GB)	GB - possible interpretations	GA - possible interpretations	order
<i>How do you treat an infected <b>pore</b>?</i>	/pɔ:/	<i>pore, paw</i>	<i>paw</i> <sup>13</sup>	6.
<i>Please, don't look at the <b>floor</b>.</i>	/flɔ:/	<i>floor, flaw</i>	<i>flaw</i> <sup>14</sup>	18.
<i>They have been covered<sup>15</sup> with <b>sores</b>.</i>	/sɔ:z/	<i>sores, saws</i>	<i>saws</i> <sup>16</sup>	27.

Table 15. Sentences dealing with rhoticity.

The last type of sentences is founded on one of the minor distributional variations; unlike GB, GA does not differentiate between /e/, /æ/, /eə/, when it precedes /r/. In fact, all of them are pronounced as /e/. (Collins, Mees 2003; Staun 2010) Consequently, the aim of this part is to reveal which word the student thinks of when hearing words such as *Marry, marry* or *merry*, which sound the same in GA. In case he/she writes down the word which is pronounced with /e/ only in GA, we might only suppose that he/she is inclined towards GA.

The table below shows the sentences used in the test. All of them were produced by Americans. The words in which this ambiguity might occur are in bold and their pronunciation is written in the second column. The third and the fourth column display possible interpretations of the particular pronunciation. The last column shows the order of the sentence in the test.

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<sup>13</sup> According to some online dictionaries such as *Cambridge dictionary* or *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *paw* is pronounced as /pa:/ in GA. Nevertheless, *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* assert that /pɔ:/ is correct.

<sup>14</sup> According to some online dictionaries such as *Cambridge dictionary* or *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *flaw* is pronounced as /fla:/ in GA. Nevertheless, *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* assert that /flɔ:/ is correct.

<sup>15</sup> Due to non-rhoticity, *covered* is pronounced /kʌvəd/ in GB, while /kʌvəd/ in GA. Consequently, the student might recognize that is pronounced by a GB speaker and opt for *sores* in this sentence.

<sup>16</sup> According to some online dictionaries such as *Cambridge dictionary* or *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *saw* is pronounced as /sa:/ in GA. Nevertheless, *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* assert that /sɔ:/ is correct.



sentence	pronunciation	GA - possible interpretations	GB - possible interpretations	order
<i>Are you <b>hairy</b>?</i>	/heri/	<i>hairy, Harry</i>	none <sup>17</sup>	2.
<i>Are you <b>Mary</b>?</i>	/meri/	<i>Mary, merry</i>	<i>merry</i>	19.
<i>Have you seen the <b>fairy</b>?</i>	/feri/	<i>fairy, ferry</i>	<i>ferry</i>	25.

Table 16. Sentences dealing with /e/, /æ/, /eə/.

The questionnaires were distributed at the eight-year grammar school Masarykovo Klasické Gymnázium in Říčany. First of all, I contacted the headmistress and an English teacher. Since I used to study at this grammar school, both ladies were eager to help me. Unfortunately, due to distance learning the procedure was quite complicated because I could not come to the school, assign the questionnaire to the students and collect all research data at a time. Nevertheless, the teachers agreed that I would send them the link to Google Forms and that the students would be assigned to complete the perception test as their homework.

### 3.2. Respondents

The perception tests were sent to the students of year six (sexta), seven (septima) and eight (oktáva). English lessons take place five times a week in each of the selected year. The majority of teachers are of Czech origin, yet an American teacher is employed at this grammar school as well. The teachers work with the student's book and workbook *Maturita Solutions* designated for upper-intermediate (B2) students.

The number of completed responses the survey received is 46: 12 from the sixth year students, 22 from the seventh year ones and 12 from the eighth year ones. The number of girls and boys is more or less equal: 24 girls and 22 boys. The age of the respondents ranges from 16 to 19: there is one sixteen-year-old, 13 seventeen-year-old, 29 eighteen-year-old and 3 nineteen-year-old students. As to the length of learning English, 39% of the students have been learning it for 10 years, 24% for 12 years, 15% for 9 years, 11% for 11 years and the rest for more years.

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<sup>17</sup> There is no word pronounced /heri/ in GB. However, the pronunciation of the word *hairy* /heəri/ resembles it.

Regarding the accent preference, as illustrated in Figure 4, the survey showed that there is a strong preference for the American accent (43%) in comparison with the British accent (13%); a third of the respondents do not prefer any accent; and as to Canadian and Australian accents, they were chosen by a small minority of the students.

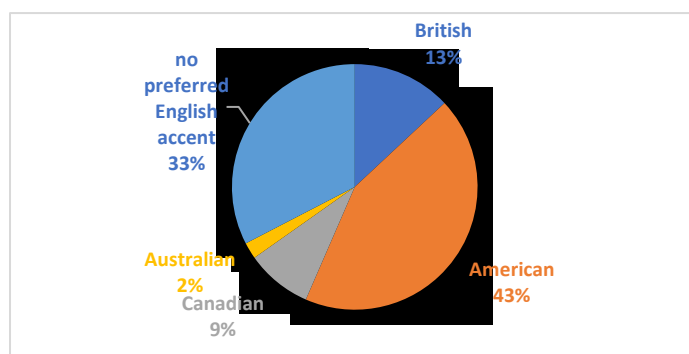


Figure 4. Chart illustrating the preferred accents of the respondents.

As to the students' favourite TV series and films, the American ones vastly outnumber the British ones: 80% of the respondents prefer watching American films and TV series, e.g., *Friends*, *Futurama*, *How I met your mother*, or *The Big Bang Theory*; while only 20% the British ones, e.g., *Sherlock* or *Top Gear*.

The last question of great importance that the students had to answer was whether they have any friends whose first language is English; and if so, where they come from. The survey revealed that 48% of the respondents do not have any friends in English speaking countries; the rest have friends either of American (22%), or English (19%), or Canadian (9%), or Australian (2%) origin.

An interesting correlation was revealed between having neither any preferred accent nor any native speaker friend. In fact, the vast majority (73%) of the respondents who do not have any preferred English accent do not have either any friends from English speaking countries (see Appendix 1).

Then, it was shown that 80% of the respondents who prefer the American accent opted for an American TV series. On the contrary, the preferred accent (American) does not correlate with the respondents' contact with native speakers, since only 22% of them do have an American friend. Actually, the majority of them (48%) do not know any native speaker, 19% have a friend from England, and a small minority from Canada (9%) and

Australia (2%). Thus, according to these numbers, the preferred accent (American) might be affected by the favourite TV series (American) (see Appendix 2).

### **3.3. Data analysis**

After all the respondents sent their answers, the data were exported from Google Forms to Microsoft Excel. Then, they were analysed step-by-step. Firstly, the general information such as the respondents' sex, age, year of study, length of learning English, preferred accents, favourite TV series/films and acquaintance with native speakers were explored. Secondly, the data relating to the perception test were analysed. A chart displaying the answers was created for each sentence/pair of sentences. Then, several pie charts were employed in order to display more general results.

## **4. Results**

The results of the perception test are described according to the four categories enumerated and discussed in 4.1. The analysis proceeds from the most general results to the most concrete ones. At the end of certain sections, we attempt to find and observe correlations between various factors.

### **4.1. The distribution of /r/ and the absence of /ɹ/ in GA**

The aim of the sentences belonging to the first category was to examine with which accent the students associate the selected homonyms containing /ɑ:/.

On the whole, the data show that almost half of the respondents (48%) opted for a word containing <-ar> (= GB interpretation), while the other half (47%) for a word containing <o> (= GA interpretation) when hearing a word containing /ɑ:/. (see Figure 5.). Since the sentences exploring this category exist in pairs, in which one sentence is pronounced by a GB speaker and the second one by a GA speaker, we can observe the influence of the speaker's accent on the student's interpretation of the words. In general, the data indicate that when the sentence was pronounced by a GA speaker, 53% of the respondent opted for a word containing <o> (= GA interpretation), while 40% for a word containing <-ar> (= GB interpretation) (see Figure 6.). Similarly, when pronounced by a GB speaker, 56% wrote a GB interpretation and 2% the American one (see Figure 7). In both cases, 1% managed to associate the word with both accents, because both words

were written down. Still, since the percentage does not differ considerably, it might lead us to the conclusion that the accent of the speaker does not seem to be such a determining factor as could be expected in this case.

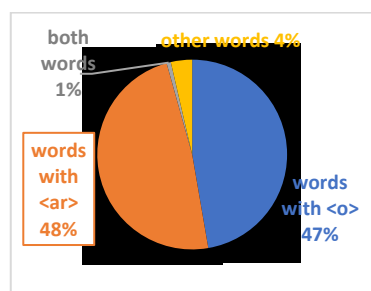


Figure 5. Interpretation of homophones with /ɑ:/ (irrespective of the speaker).

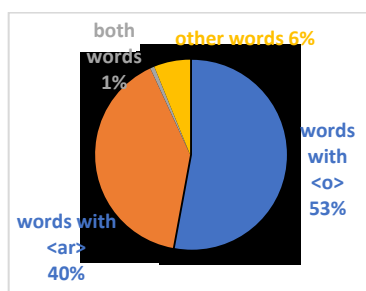


Figure 6. Interpretation of homophones with /ɑ:/ pronounced by a GA speaker.

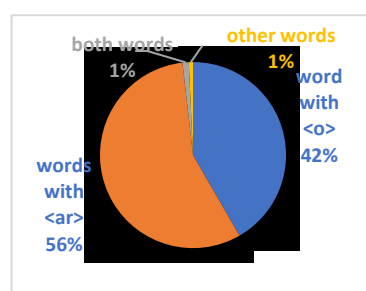


Figure 7. Interpretation of homophones with /ɑ:/ pronounced by a GB speaker.

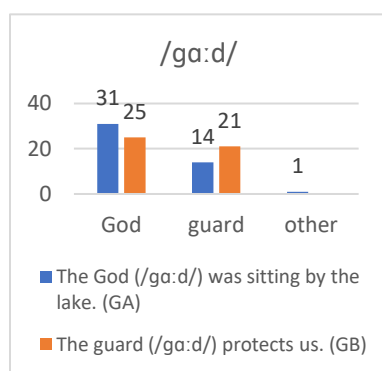


Figure 8. Occurrence of *God/guard* in the answers.

The following section describes the particular pairs of sentences and the students' interpretation of the missing words. The results of each pair of sentences are accompanied by a chart illustrating the occurrence of words in the answers. The columns always refer to the number of respondents who associated the selected homophone with the particular word when the sentence was produced either by an American (blue colour) or by a Briton (orange colour).

The first pair of sentences comprises the homophone /gɑ:d/. As Figure 8. illustrates, the majority of the students opted for the word *God* irrespective of the speaker's accent. This might be caused by their inclination to GA. Still, the word *guard* was thought of as well, especially when hearing the second sentence, pronounced by a GB speaker.

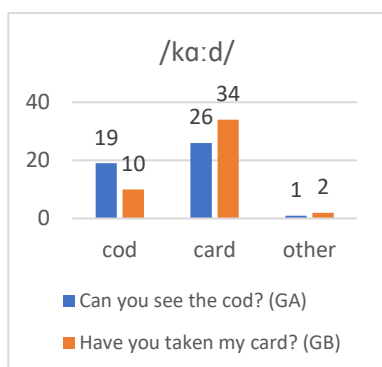


Figure 9. Occurrence of *cod/card* in the answers.

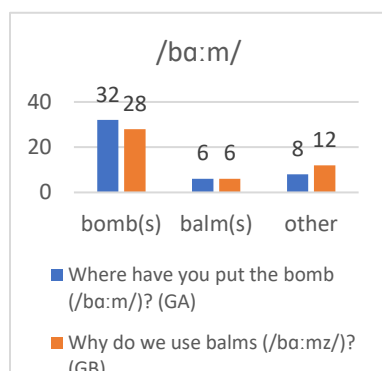


Figure 10. Occurrence of *bomb/balm* in the answers.

The second pair of sentences includes the homophone /kɑ:d/. When compared to the homophone /gɑ:d/, there is a strong preference for *card* in both sentences (see Figure 9.). It does not have to be necessarily caused by an inclination to GB, it might rather stem from the fact that a lot of students are not familiar with the word *cod*.

The pair of sentences with the homophone /bɑ:m/ differs from the others because *balm* does not comprise <r>, so rhoticity and non-rhoticity cannot be reflected in this case. Moreover, this noun is pronounced identically in GB and GA. Thus, it is only *bomb* that might be indicative of an accent preference (GA in this case). Consequently, this pair of sentences has not been taken into consideration in Figures 5.,6.,7. As to the results, the majority of the respondents associated /bɑ:m/ with *bomb* in both cases, which might indicate their inclination towards GA. On the other hand, it is possible that *balm* is unknown to them.

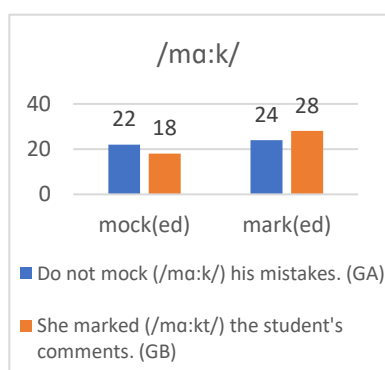


Figure 11. Occurrence of *mock/mark* in the answers.

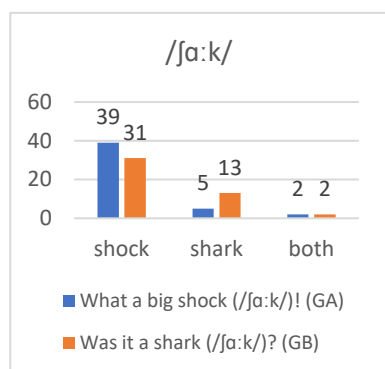


Figure 12. Occurrence of *shock/shark* in the answers.

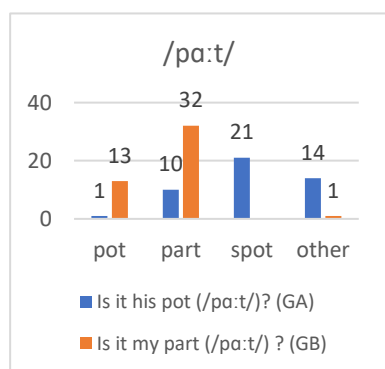


Figure 13. Occurrence of *pot/part* in the answers.

The fourth pair of sentences contains the homophone /ma:k/. As illustrated in Figure 11., the occurrence of *mock* and *mark* is similar (22:24) when pronounced by an American, while when pronounced by a GB speaker, *mark* predominates (28:18). However, this might be caused by the ignorance of *mock* because when comparing the results of year six, seven and eight it can be seen that less experienced English learners tended to write down *mark*. On the contrary, the students of the eight year associated this homophone with *mock* more frequently.

The pair of sentences including the homophone /ʃa:k/ (illustrated in Figure 12.) exemplifies a strong preference for GA, for the majority (39 and 31) of the respondents associated the homophone with *shock* in both cases. This time, it cannot be attributed to any ignorance of the second word, since *shark*, unlike *balm* or *mock*, belongs to well-known words.

Another homophone occurring in the test was /pa:t/. It is obvious, that the speaker's origin was of fundamental importance in this case, since as to the sentence pronounced by a GB speaker, 32 students associated it with *part* (= GB interpretation), while 13 with *pot* (= GA interpretation). The sentence *Is it his spot?*, pronounced by an American, was misinterpreted by the majority of the respondents as we can see in Figure 13. In fact, 21 students mistook *his pot* for *his spot*. Still, this misinterpretation can be counted as a GA inclination, for in GB *spot* would be pronounced /spɒt/.

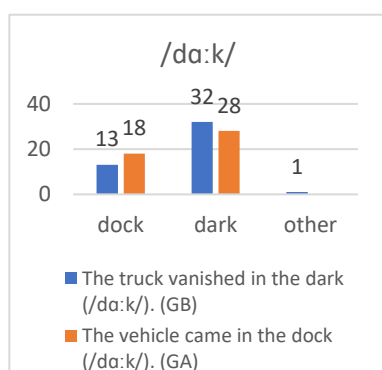


Figure 14. Occurrence of *dock/dark* in the answers.

The last pair of sentences, illustrated in Figure 14., deals with the homophone /dɑ:k/. The data show that the occurrence of *dark* is more frequent. We can ascribe it either to the inclination towards GB, or to the ignorance of *dock*.

#### 4.1.1. Effect of the preferred accent on the results

Since the respondents were asked to write down their preferred accent, we can examine whether their choice is reflected in the interpretation of the missing words.

Only 25% of the students whose preferred accent is GA wrote down the word containing /ɒ/ (= GA interpretation) in both sentences. The results of the others are very heterogeneous: they either opted for the GB interpretation in one sentence and for the GA interpretation in the second one, or even wrote the GB interpretation in both sentences. The former indicates that they are aware of accent homonymy, for they managed to associate the selected homophone with both accents.

As to those who prefer the British accent, their answers are less diverse. The GB interpretation has been opted for in most cases. Still, 30% opted for *shock* (= GA interpretation) in both sentences. In addition, both interpretations of /gɑ:d/, /kɑ:d/, /mɑ:k/, /ʃɑ:k/, /pɑ:t/ occurred occasionally.

## 4.2. Alveolar tap

The second category of the sentences scrutinized whether the students are aware of the alveolar tap, which is indicative of GA.

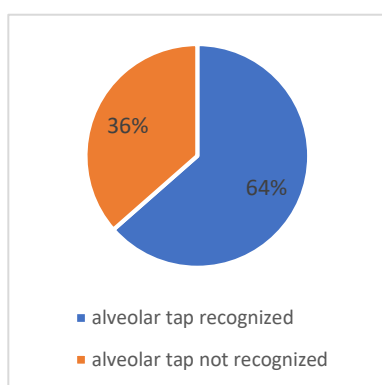


Figure 15. Illustration of the percentage of cases in which [ɾ] was recognized.

On the whole, the survey revealed that the alveolar tap was recognized in 64% of cases (illustrated in Figure 15.).

Figures 16.-22. exemplify the sentences in which the alveolar tap was identified in most cases. The columns display the number of respondents who opted for the particular words. Figure 17. shows that 5 respondents wrote down *pet*, which is not correct due to the vowel /e/ instead of /æ/. Similarly, in another sentence 6 students opted for *letter* instead of *latter*

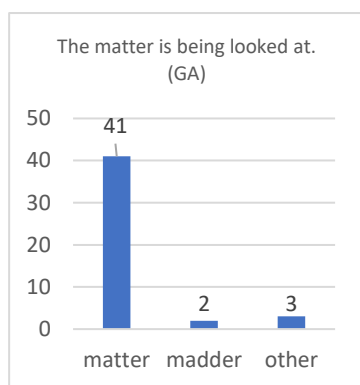


Figure 16. Occurrence of *matter* and *madder* in the answers.

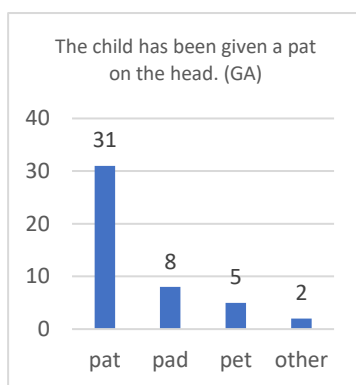


Figure 17. Occurrence of *pat* and *pad* in the answers.

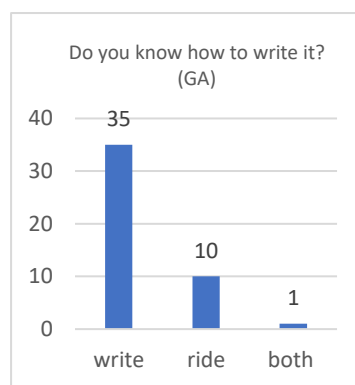


Figure 18. Occurrence of *write* and *ride* in the answers.

(illustrated in Figure 22.) Still, we can count both *pet* and *letter* as words in which [ɾ] is pronounced in GA.

However, Figures 23. and 24. illustrate that not always the occurrence of the word with [ɾ] predominates. In fact, the former suggests that the frequency of *metal* and *medal* does not differ considerably (25:21). The latter even reveals that /feɪrɪd/ has been associated with *faded* by a vast majority of the respondents.



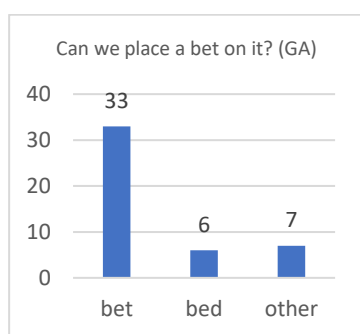


Figure 19. Occurrence of *bet* and *bed* in the answers.

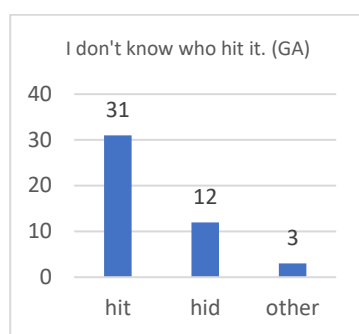


Figure 20. Occurrence of *hit* and *hid* in the answers.

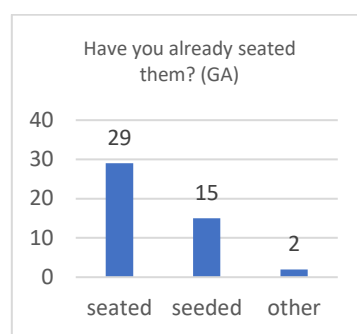


Figure 21. Occurrence of *seated* and *seeded* in the answers.

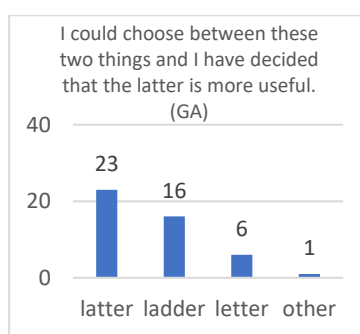


Figure 22. Occurrence of *latter* and *ladder* in the answers.

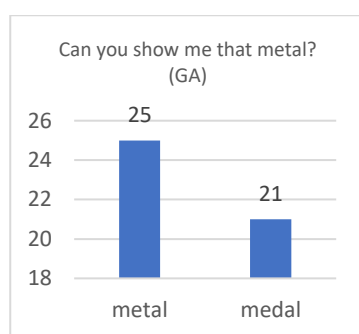


Figure 23. Occurrence of *metal* and *medal* in the answers.

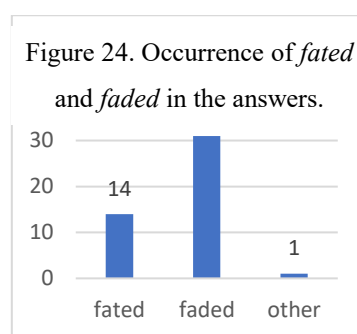


Figure 24. Occurrence of *fated* and *faded* in the answers.

#### 4.2.1. Effect of the preferred accent and contact with native speakers on the perception of [r]

Only 12 respondents managed to recognize the alveolar tap in each sentence, another 2 respondents in 8 sentences, 4 respondents in 7 sentences, 7 respondents in 6 sentences and the rest in less than 6 sentences. It seems that preferring either the American accent or not any accent at all might have affected the students' choice because 12 of the "more successful" respondents (= those who recognized from six to nine alveolar taps) stated that their preferred accent was GA, and 9 of them that they did not have any accent preference. Similarly, it seems that having an American friend or on the contrary not having a friend from an English speaking country at all might have an impact on the perception of the alveolar tap, for 8 students (out of the 25 who did recognize the alveolar tap in the majority of cases) stated that they had an American friend and another 13 that they have not befriended any native speaker (see Appendix 3).

### 4.3. Homophones ending with /ɔ:/ - rhoticity

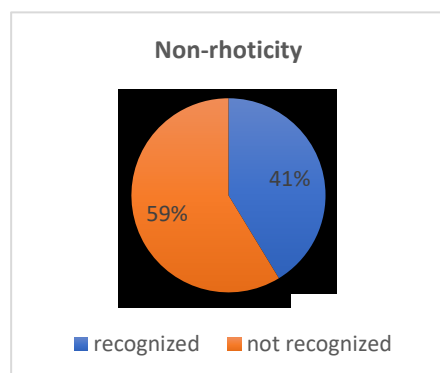


Figure 25. The percentage of cases in which non-rhoticity was recognized.

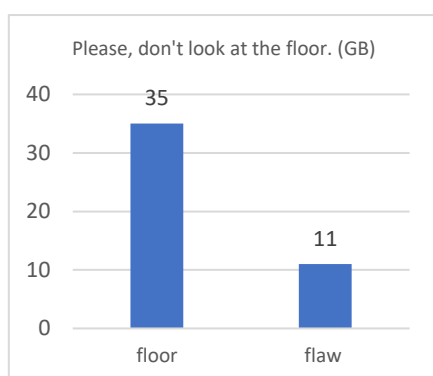


Figure 26. Occurrence of *floor* and *flaw* in the answers.

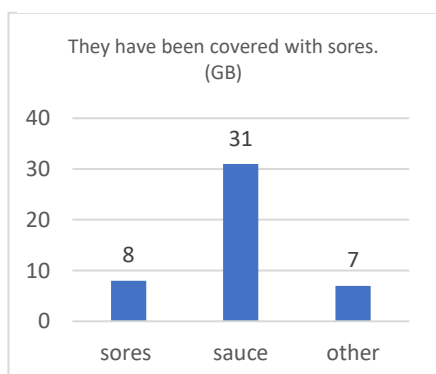


Figure 27. Occurrence of *sores*, *saws* and other words in the answers.

The third category of the sentences were aimed at discovering whether the students associate the homophones ending with /ɔ:/ with words ending with <r> / <-re> or with words ending with <-aw>. The former might indicate their preference for GB, as it is a non-rhotic accent. The latter is not indicative of any accent preference, since words ending with <aw> are pronounced identically in GB and GA.

On the whole, the data show that non-rhoticity was recognized in 59% of cases, as is shown in Figure 25.

The sentence *Please, don't look at the floor* is the most relevant. As it is demonstrated in Figure 26., 35 respondents associated /flɔ:/ with *floor*, while 11 with *flaw*. The majority (15) of those who opted for the former stated that they do not have any preferred accent; 10 respondents prefer the American accent, 6 the British one and the rest the Canadian and Australian ones.

On the contrary, the interpretations of the two other sentences seem to have been challenging for the students. In fact, only 8 respondents managed to recognize *sores*, as is indicated in Figure. 27. The majority of them associated /sɔ:z/ with *sauce*, which is a misinterpretation as *sauce* is pronounced /sɔ:s/. Still, it reflects the fact that non-rhoticity has not been

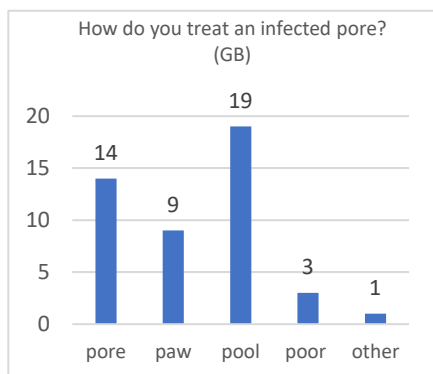


Figure 28. Occurrence of *pore*, *paw* and other words in the answers.

recognized in most cases. As to *saws*, whose occurrence had been expected, it was not written down by anyone.

Finally, the results relating to the last sentence are astounding since 19 respondents mistook /pɔ:/ with /pu:l/ (see Figure 28.). Nevertheless, 17 respondents managed to associate the homophone with *pore* or *poor*, which displays their ability to decode non-rhotic pronunciation. As far as *paw*, whose pronunciation does not differ in rhotic and non-rhotic accents, is concerned, it has been written down

by 9 respondents.

#### 4.4. Mary, hairy and fairy - /e/ before /r/

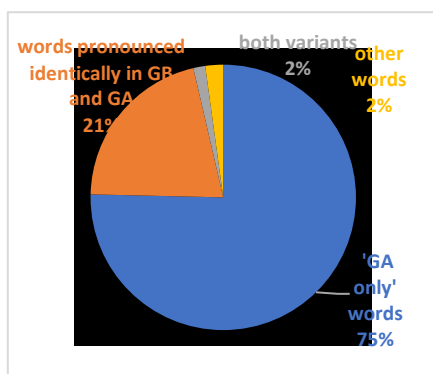


Figure 28. Illustration of the interpretation of words containing /e/ before /r/.

The aim of the last category of the sentences was to explore with which words the respondents associate the homophones /herɪ/, /merɪ/ and /ferɪ/. All of them might have various interpretations in GA. On the contrary, in GB there is one possible interpretation, for, unlike GA, this accent differentiates between /e/, /æ/, /eə/, when it precedes /r/.

On the whole, the data suggest that 'GA-only' words were opted for in 75% of cases, while only 21% of the written words have identical pronunciation in both GB and GA.

The results of all the sentences examining this variation show that the 'GA-only' words, namely *Harry*, *Mary*, (*married*) and *fairy* have been written by 30-43 of the respondents. Nevertheless, only 15 of them associated the selected homophones with 'GA-only' words in all the sentences.

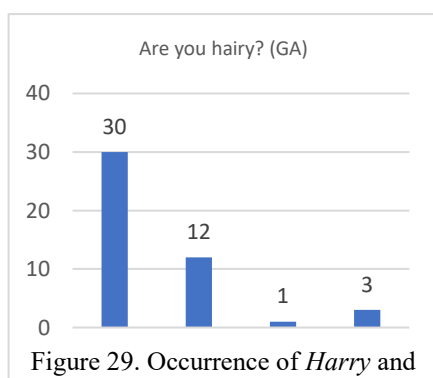


Figure 29. Occurrence of *Harry* and *hairy* in the answers.

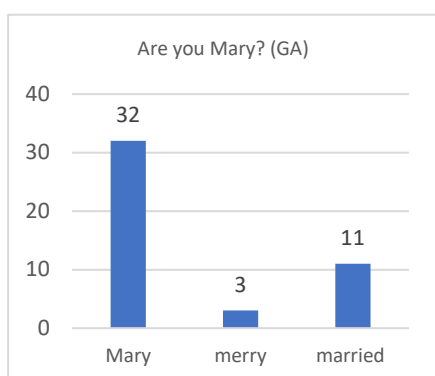
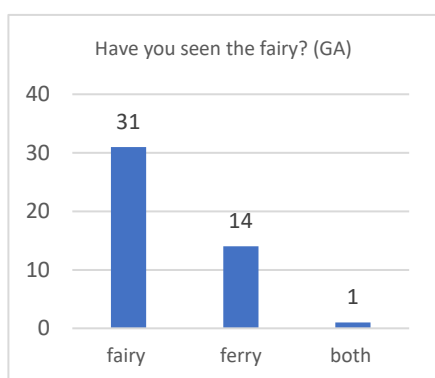


Figure 30. Occurrence of *Mary*, *merry* and *married* in the answers.



In Figure 30. we can notice that a considerable amount of the students opted for *married*, which does not correspond to /meri/. Still, it is true that the verb *marry*, from which *married* is derived, exemplifies another word which is pronounced /meri/ in GA, while /mæri/ in GB. Consequently, we can count *married* pronounced with /e/ as a 'GA-only' word as well.

As to *hairy*, *merry* and *ferry*, they were chosen a minority of the respondents. It does not reflect any accent preference since they are pronounced with /e/ in both GB and GA. Nevertheless, we might presume that a 'strictly' GB-oriented respondent would have associated the homophones with them.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of the practical part was to reveal with which accent the students associate the selected homonyms and whether they are familiar with accent homonymy. In general, if we take the results of all four categories of the sentences into consideration, it is obvious there is not a strong inclination to any accent, for the answers of the majority of respondents were very heterogenous. In fact, the survey showed that only **11%** of the respondents associated the selected homophones only with the **American** accent and **2%** only with the **British** accent in **each sentence**. Nevertheless, this diversity of responses reflects the students' capability of associating the selected homophones with both accents, so it might be considered as a clear sign of their familiarity with both GB and GA.

As to the category scrutinizing the interpretation of homophones containing /ɑ:/, the occurrence of 'GB-only' and 'GA-only' words in the answers is balanced. The data also revealed that the accent of the speaker did not have such an impact on the student's interpretation. The homophones which were associated with GA in majority of cases were

/gɑ:d/ (only when pronounced by a GA speaker), /ʃɑ:k/, /bɑ:m/, while /dɑ:k/ and /kɑ:d/ with GB. Nonetheless, we have to take into account the fact that the results might have been affected by the students' lack of familiarity with the words *balm*, *dock* and *cod*. On the other hand, what did not differ significantly was the occurrence of *mock* and *mark* in the answers. Lastly, it is noteworthy that the majority of the respondents misunderstood the American *his pot* /hɪs pɑ:t/ as *his spot* /hɪs spɑ:t/.

As far as the alveolar tap is concerned, it was identified in 64% of cases. However, only 23% of the respondents managed to recognize the alveolar tap in each sentence. The words/phrases in which [ɾ] was revealed the most frequently was *matter*, *pat on*, *write it*, *bet on*, *hit it*, *seated*, *latter*; /meɪtəl/ was associated with *metal* in 25 cases and with *medal* in 21 cases. On the contrary, 69% of the respondents opted for *faded* and only 31% for *fated* when hearing /feɪtɪd/.

Another category of the sentences explored the perception of non-rhoticity in words ending with /ɔ:/. The data showed that non-rhoticity was recognized in 41% of cases. The only homophone which was associated with the non-rhotic pronunciation in the majority of cases was /flɔ:/, since 76% of the respondents associated it with *floor*. The other two homophones /pɔ:/ and /sɔ:z/ were associated with non-rhotic pronunciation less frequently. What was unanticipated was the association of /sɔ:z/ with *sauce* and of /pɔ:/ with *pool* by a substantial number of students.

The last category investigated the interpretation of the homophones /həri/, /merɪ/ and /ferɪ/. The survey found that the students wrote down the American interpretation more frequently since the occurrence of *Harry*, *Mary* and *fairy* predominated.

## CONCLUSION

The first aim of this bachelor thesis was to delve into GB and GA and to classify the most distinctive differences between these two accents, which is dealt with in the theoretical part. In order to achieve this goal 11 books on English phonetics and phonology were studied in great detail. Then, the accent dissimilarities found in the publications were divided into four groups: *systemic*, *distributional*, *lexical* and *realization variation*. The enumeration in each section proceeded from the most salient differences to the rarest ones.

The practical part was based on the perception test which was aimed at examining how Czech students of English perceive the selected homonyms and with which words they associate them. The test explored the students' interpretation of 29 homonyms containing either the vowel /ɑ:/, i.e. /gɑ:d/, which signifies *God* in GA but *guard* in GB; or the alveolar tap, i.e. /mætə/, which stands for *matter* in GA, but resembles *madder* in both GB and GA; or the vowel /ɔ:/ in the final position of a word, e.g. /flɔ:/, which means *flaw* in both GB and GA, but *floor* only in GB; or /e/ before /r/, e.g. /meri/, the pronunciation of *merry* in both GB and GA, but of *Mary* only in GA.

The analysis revealed that only a tiny minority showed a strong inclination towards GA (11%) and GB (2%). The results of the rest of the respondents were characteristic of mixture of GB and GA, so no firm pattern could be observed. Regarding the stated accent preference of the students, there is a discrepancy between what the students think that they favour and what their answers reflected. In fact, the results of those who stated that they favour GA did not differ considerably from those of the students without any favourite English accent. Thus, it appears that the awareness about specific accent features is not established. Similarly, having contacts in English speaking countries seems to have had an impact on the results only rarely, as the answers of the respondents having a friend in the USA or England were more or less comparable to the responses of those who do not know any native speaker.

To conclude, according to the research, it is evident that Czech students of English are capable of comprehending both GB and GA in most cases. Nevertheless, the majority of the answers were very heterogenous, which prevented us from revealing any firm pattern. Actually, the data showed that the students are not strongly inclined either to GB

or to GA. This might be a result of the amount of students' exposure to both GB and GA at school and other environments. In addition, we have to take into consideration the difficulty of some of the selected words. Still, it seems that the students have not been acquainted with all the major differences between these two accents yet, which definitely contributed to possible misinterpretation and to the mixture of GB and GA which they employed in the answers. Thus, it might be worthwhile to raise awareness of individual characteristic features of GA and GB. Furthermore, accent homonymy can offer an effective and entertaining way to start discussion about the main differences between these two widely used varieties.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

Correlation between having neither any preferred accent nor any native speaker

What is your preferred English accent?	If you have any friends whose mother tongue is English where do they come from?
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	the USA
I do not have any preferred English accent.	the USA
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	the USA
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	Canada
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
I do not have any preferred English accent.	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.

## Appendix 2

Correlation between the preferred accent (American), favourite TV series and friends from English speaking countries.

What is your preferred English accent?	What is your favourite British or American TV series?	If you have any friends whose mother tongue is English where do they come from?
American	USA - Futurama	England
American	USA- Big little lies	Canada
American	USA- Rick and Morty	Australia
American	GB - Top Gear	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
American	USA- breaking bad	England
American	USA- Lucifer	the USA
American	USA- game of thrones	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
American	GB - Doctor Who, modern series (2005-)	England
American	USA - Suits	England
American	USA - Friends	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
American	USA - Futurama	the USA
American	USA - How I met your mother	the USA
American	USA - Big Bang Theory	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
American	USA- Futurama	the USA
American	USA - Big Bang Theory	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
American	USA- Shameless	the USA
American	USA- Stranger Things	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
American	USA - Friends	the USA
American	USA - Futurama	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.
American	USA- Friends	I do not know anyone from English speaking countries.

## Appendix 3

Table 19. Correlation between the preferred accent, having a friend from an English speaking country and the perception of [ɹ] illustrated on the answers in which [ɹ] occurs from 6 to 9 times.

	preferred accent	origin of friends										total [r]
1.	British	the USA	hid	metal	faded	pat	matter	bed	ladder	write	seated	6x
2.	Canadian	England	hid	medal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	6x
3.	American	Canada	hid	medal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	ride	seated	6x
4.	Australian	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bat	ladder	write	seated	6x
5.	no preferred English accent	the USA	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	letter	ride	seated	7x
6.	no preferred English accent	none	hit	medal	faded	Pet	matter	bet	letter	write	seeded	6x
7.	American	the USA	hid	medal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	6x
8.	no preferred English accent	none	hit	medal	faded	pet	matter	bet	Letter	write	seeded	6x
9.	American	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
10.	American	the USA	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	8x
11.	no preferred English accent	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	ladder	write	seated	8x
12.	American	the USA	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
13.	American	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
14.	Canadian	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
15.	American	the USA	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
16.	American	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
17.	no preferred English accent	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	7x
18.	American	the USA	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
19.	American	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
20.	no preferred English accent	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
21.	no preferred English accent	the USA	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
22.	no preferred English accent	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x
23.	American	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	7x
24.	no preferred English accent	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	7x
25.	American	none	hit	metal	faded	pat	matter	bet	latter	write	seated	9x